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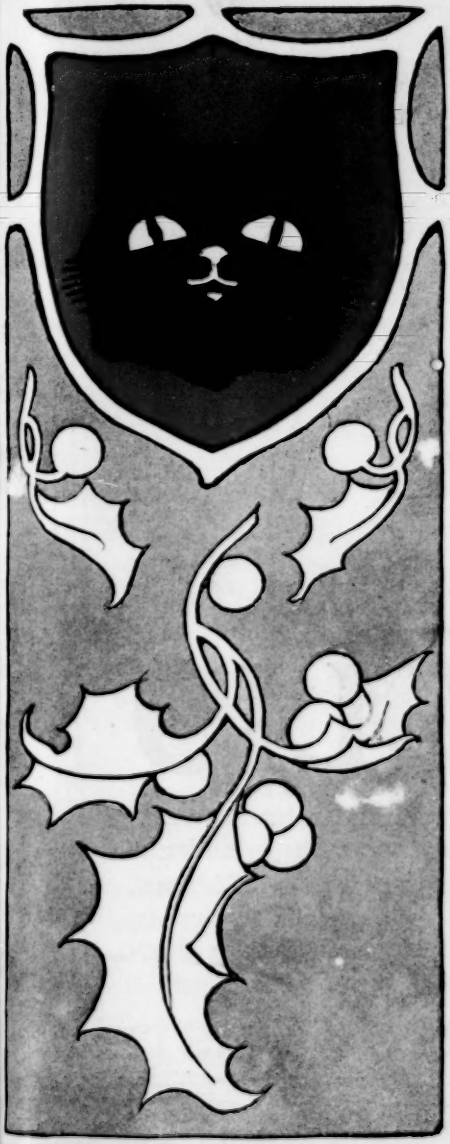
The Black Cat



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The Black Cat

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But Yet a Mother.*

BY FLORENCE TABOR CRITCHLOW.

THERE was neither snow nor slush, nor so much as a nip of frost. The evening was exceptionally mild, even for San Francisco. Yet the air was all a-tingle with the Spirit of Christmas, which is not defined by compass and climate, but is the very spirit of humanity itself. One person, only, seemed alien to the hour. She was merely a shabby old woman. Just at the silver edge of the December dusk the swirling currents of the crowd had stranded her, human jetsam, in a corner at the entrance of a great department store.

Nobody knew who she was, nor where she came from, nor why she was there. Nobody cared. Everybody was hurrying into the store for belated buying, or hurrying out of the store with last precious parcels, or hurrying past the store to wherever it is that a crowd is always going. Amid the gay and prosperous throng the old woman was like a frost-bitten and withered plant which the gardener has forgotten to remove from the mass of flowers.

In the bitter storms of an eastern winter her thin clothing would have called forth compassionate interest. It was, however, decently clean, if cheap, and patched, not ragged. A shawl,

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that omnibus garment of the poor, protected her shoulders, and sketchily concealed the baby on her arm. That she retained the primary instinct, motherhood, was evident from the quality of the baby's frock and the delicate, if narrow, lace on its petticoats. If the old woman were begging, it was slyly and with artful indifference. Her back was toward the door and the crowd. Intently she watched the wayward children of the street, whose noses were glued to the glass imprisoning a paradise of toys. In her eyes was the look of hungry, mystified terror seen in the eyes of dogs allowed to watch the drowning of their puppies.

A plump Mr. Cheeryble of a man, with his arms full of deliciously knobby bundles, paused to thrust a piece of shiny silver into the hand that held the baby. When the old woman turned, he was lost in the current, never to know the pain caused by his unthoughtful kindliness. The old woman gave a frightened glance toward the policeman directly opposite the door. He, for the peace of his own soul, since he was a man before he was an officer, conveniently looked the other way.

But Mrs. Millicent Peckham saw the shabby old woman, saw the man with the knobby bundles, saw the glitter of the silver, and saw the eyes of the policeman, which chanced to meet her own. Mrs. Millicent Peckham was secretary of the Woman's Sociological Club, and President of the Minors' Protection League, and prominent member in many other organized philanthropies. She knew the awful danger of pauperizing the poor by indiscriminate giving. Having no children of her own she was professional mother to the public. With one white-gloved hand she summoned the officer to her side. Will all the Millicent Peckhams of this world wear white gloves in the next world, I wonder.

"Arrest this woman for begging," magnificently she commanded.

"It's Christmas Eve," the man remonstrated.

"Is that any justification for ignoring the law? On the contrary, it is the very time when people of spasmodic generosity most need protection against such appeals to their emotional sensibilities."

She passed on, into the store, but, with a feeling of duty not

conscientiously performed, turned back. The officer was moving sulkily. He meant to send the old woman home, with another bit of silver and a gentle warning. Mrs. Peckham, from past experiences, suspected some such intention.

"I think I had better go to the station with her," she announced. "If there's no matron, she may need the protection of a friendly woman's presence. And that innocent baby must not be put into a cell."

"Maybe 'twould be more friendly-like, if you'd protect her now, without having her arrested," suggested the policeman, hopefully.

"Oh, no," she protested, with horror. "I cannot interfere with the rights of a private citizen. But after she's arrested she becomes a ward of the public, whom it is then my duty and privilege to take care of."

The shabby old woman went along with the meekness customary to those who have always been bullied by life. She walked a little unsteadily. Arrived at the station-house, she sank on a bench.

"Drunk," said the officer, his sympathies vanishing. The old women lifted her head.

"I hain't drunk," she said, but her voice drawled away, confirming the officer's diagnosis.

"I'll take the baby," said Mrs. Millicent Peckham, with great magnanimity ignoring possible consequences to her white gloves.

The shabby old woman let the little lace-trimmed figure slide out of her arms without resistance. In Mrs. Peckham's experience most of these women fought against surrendering their last hold on decency, the mother-right. The drunker they were, the harder they fought. The limpness of the little waxen figure startled her even more than the mother's slack hold. Drawn out from the protecting shadow of the shoulder shawl, the face of the child showed unnaturally small, yet unnaturally plump, in the white electric light. With a certainty of a deeper tragedy than she had at first suspected the philanthropist bent over the waxy face, with its hectic cheeks. Then she laughed in hysterical relief.

"Why," she cried out, "it's a doll!"

The desk lieutenant, to whom drunken old women were disgusting, and no novelty, began to show interest.

"Yes, it's a dawl," said the shabby woman. When she looked up, the desk lieutenant saw that she was not really old. The web of lines of the leathery skin had been bitten in by grief, by pain, by hunger. But in Mrs. Peckham's well-regulated mind the certainty of fraud was now established.

"It's a dawl," repeated the shabby woman who wasn't old. "But I wa'n't begging. An' I hain't drunk. I hain't never been drunk. I hain't never begged. It allus seemed to me 's if I couldn't never get to be decent agin, if onct I got down that low. I hain't drunk. I be jes' plain hungry. I hain't allus had enough to eat. But I hain't never begged."

The lieutenant was examining the doll. It was, in truth, almost as large as a baby, a very new baby. It had hair that was almost real. Its eyes opened and shut.

"Such dolls are very costly," he said, inquiringly. "I know, because I bought one to-day for my little girl."

"The clothes are all hand-made," said Mrs. Millicent Peckham. "Hand-made clothes are more costly than big dolls. All my lingerie is hand-made, to order, at Kendal's, and it is frightfully expensive." She looked at the old woman, who wasn't old but ought to have been, with the ever-ready suspicion of the rich for whatever they cannot understand in the poor.

"I made 'em myself," said the shabby woman, with more spirit than one could have expected from her.

The lieutenant was better acquainted with shabby old women than was Mrs. Peckham. He was not yet ready to form an opinion.

"Why were you carrying the doll?" he gently inquired. "Wait a minute," he interrupted himself, and took up his desk phone.

"Mint, 59. . . . This is Moreland. Send in a cup of coffee — make it three cups of good coffee, *hot,* and sandwiches for three. I've company."

"Mint 59" was next door, and the tray arrived almost immediately.

"It's time for my luncheon, and I'd like to have you

ladies accept my treat," he awkwardly invited them.

He looked anxiously at the two women. He hoped White-gloves could take a hint. He had seen something in the eyes of the shabby woman, heard something in her voice, which told him not to offer her charity, though she was starving. But anybody could accept a share. If White-gloves only understood. And Mrs. Millicent Peckham did understand. Or, if she didn't wholly understand, she was a lady at heart, even though she tried to be Philanthropist — with a capital P — by profession. She drank vile coffee from a double-edged cup as gracefully as she would have sipped it from a cup of Royal Wettin. The shabby old woman accepted simply the hospitality offered thus. In her very ignorance was the making of a lady. Her face was a little less pale, her hands a little less trembly. It would take more than a cup of coffee to brighten her hopeless eyes.

"Now," the Lieutenant again gently asked, "why were you carrying the doll?"

"I git mighty lonesome, since my little girl went away," she answered quietly. Her voice no longer trailed away into utter indistinctness. "I live by myself in a left-over refugee shack. I do any kind of work I can git. Sometimes I can't git none. When I come home, nights, and hear the sea — I live out Richmond way, — hear the sea, like babies cryin' in their sleep, I can't help thinking of my little girl, an' how I hain't ever goin' to see her any more."

The lieutenant nodded comprehendingly. He thought that his home would be very lonely, indeed, if his little girl went away forever. Mrs. Millicent Peckham, however, did not understand how one could miss a child. She did not believe, either, in euphemisms, nor in sentimentality about plain facts. She spoke somewhat sharply, for that was the only way to deal with these people.

"You mean, your child is dead, and you carry a doll in its place, pretending it's alive?"

"No," said the old woman, with the strange patience of the very poor. "She hain't dead. They took her away from me. She'll be growed up when they let her come home. She won't never be my little girl any more."

She spoke without bitterness, with that calm acceptance of fate and its conditions, characteristic of a peasant and a pariah caste. For the first time, Mrs. Millicent Peckham really saw the old woman herself, instead of a preconceived conception. She had not thought of the other as a woman; only as a beggar, a characterless unit in a class. Now, she distinguished an individual.

"Your name's Widdicomb," she accused. She seemed to be saying, "Deny it if you dare." She turned toward the lieutenant.

"I remember this case. Laura Widdicomb was an incorrigible truant, and, finally, a thief. We had to send her to proper surroundings, at our Girls' Training Home, in the country. You can see for yourself what the mother is, what the home must be like."

The lieutenant turned upon the old woman a look, not of condemnation, but of inquiry. Mrs. Peckham considered his conduct very irregular. He should have locked the creature up, or else sent her home. But he was a human being, as well as an officer. He was used to estimating character quickly, as merchants estimate the value of goods. To him, the old woman did not seem a vicious person. The work that evening was dull. He wanted to hear the story. The old woman talked in the flat voice of the very poor, of those who have struggled hopelessly and have surrendered.

"Lauretta wasn't a bad girl. You mustn't believe that, Judge. You see, I've allus had to work might hard fer every dollar. Dollars look big. I don't suppose you folks know how big a dollar kin git to be, to anybody what has earned it, theyselves. An' so, I wouldn't buy Laurie no dawl. Dawls ain't fer poor folks, I telled her. I never had no dawl. I telled Laurie she can't have one. She's an awful set little thing. She pestered me to death. She wanted to know, if Santa Claus brung her a dawl, would I let her keep it. So I up and telled her there hain't no Santa Claus what brings folks nawthin' but what they helps theyselves to.

"When come Laurie's eight year old she hain't never had no dawl. A woman I worked fer, off an' on, heared about it. She give Laurettie a doll for Christmas. My, 'twas a beauty, all tricked out with lace petticoats, and real shoon and hair. Seems

like Laurettie was in heaven, jes' to look at it. I wouldn't let her touch it. I knowed what had to be done. Laurettie, she didn't have no shoon. The truant officer, he said she must go to school. I says, how kin she go when she hain't got a shoe to her back? He said I'd have to git her some, or the sassiety would take her away from me.

"The woman what runs that sassiety, she come to see me. She looked some like you, ma'am. Maybe 'twas you. I kind of disremember whether she wore a brown or a blue dress. Of course if 'twas a brown dress, it couldn't be you, seein' you've got on a blue, — onless you could afford two such elegant dresses. She said she guessed they'd better take the child, anyway. She didn't think a refugee shack was the right place to bring up a child in. She seen that dawl. She said she guessed I could afford shoon. Laurettie's all I've got. I didn't mind so much, her havin' the dawl. But I'd rather she didn't have no dawl than fer me not to have her. So I sold the dawl, and bought her some shoon, and sent her to school. I didn't think nawthin', then, 'bout the dawl belongin' to her, not to me.

"An' las' Christmas, here come Laurettie home with another dawl. She wouldn't tell where she got it. She'd jes' set on the floor, an' rock it. Onct, I heard a preacher say, that a body needs more'n clothes an' potatoes. He said, the body hain't everythin'. He told about a man what didn't have nawthin' in the world but two loaves of bread. An' he sold one of them loaves, an' bought some kind of posies, to feed his soul. It sounded kind of silly, when plain bread, to feed your stomick, is so hard to git. But when I seen Laurettie over that dawl, I knowed what the preacher meant.

"Every time the door opened, she'd hide the dawl under her little petticoats. When the officer come, he seen it a-sticking out. She'd stole the dawl. She said 'twa'n't no worse than fer me to steal the dawl that was give to her. That woman, the one that looked some like you, ma'am, only she had on a — a brown dress — I remember, now, 'twas brown, — she said how I'd encouraged the child in luxury. So they took her away. They put her in a sort of prison school. They say she can't come out till she's twenty-one. So, I'll never have my little

Laurettie any more. I wonder if they let her have a dawl.

"I was awful lonesome. I got to thinking there must be lots of other little girls that hain't never had no dawls. So, every week, I saved a few pennies. It didn't cost so much, alone, to eat. Bimeby, I had enough to buy this dawl. I made all its little clothes, myself. I'm a good hand with the needle, only folks won't trust me no more with nice work, because I don't look like. I pretended it was Laurettie I was sewin' fer, same's I used to when she was a baby. To-night, I got to feelin' most like 'twas her I was a-carryin' in my arms.

"Honest, Judge, I wasn't begging. I was a-watchin' fer some little girl to give her to. You kin tell those that hain't got no dawls, by the lonesomeness in their eyes. 'Twa'n't the little girl, though, that I was thinkin' most about. I wanted to save some other mother from being lonesome."

The lieutenant looked inquiringly this time at Mrs. Millicent Peckham. That lady's eyes were softly shining.

"I never knew that mothers were like that," she answered.

She went to the telephone, and called for long-distance. The old woman didn't understand the one-sided conversations with different people. The lieutenant did. He smiled, queerly. He began to like Mrs. Millicent Peckham, when he found that she, too, was human. Mrs. Peckham came over to the bench, and sat down by the old woman.

"Mrs. Widdicomb," she said, gently, "Will you go to supper with me? Then Ill take you home in my motor. But, first, we're going to that big store where I found you. We're going to buy doll-furniture, and all the things that go with your handiwork. We're going to give them with the doll to the little girl who will love that particular doll the best, for your sake. You will have to pick out the kind of things that little girls like, because I've never been really well acquainted with any little girl. And we will buy little girl dresses, and pretty ribbons, and shoon." She smiled over the quaint survival of the old plural.

Not yet did Mrs. Widdicomb understand. Mrs. Peckham went on with difficulty. She wasn't used to apology.

"You see, I am really the one who stole Lauretta's doll. I advised you to sell it. I forgot that souls have to be fed, as well

as bodies clothed, and minds educated. I was the woman who took her away from you. I'm going to give her back. I have been talking to the Governor. He's signing her parole, this minute. She will be home to-morrow. I — I wish I had a little girl to come home, — from anywhere."

Tenderly she took the hard hands between her own soft bare palms. Somehow, I think all of the Millicent Peckhams will have to take off their white gloves before they can turn the key of heaven.

To the Ends of the Earth.*

BY MICHAEL WHITE.

FOR this story the main requirements are an East African coast settlement of white-washed dwellings in a riotous bouquet of tropical foliage, itinerant steamers dropping anchor now and then in the palm-fringed harbor, the beginning of a railroad which was to tap the interior for ivory, hides, etc., and one Bogart whose native state was Ohio. Bogart's business in Dar Abbas was to build the aforesaid railroad, no great engineering feat as he regarded it, but presenting other difficulties peculiar to that region. To begin with he was troubled paradoxically with too little and too much assistance. While the climate of Dar Abbas incubated all the deadly fevers to kill off competent white men in a day or a week as the case might be, it seemed particularly favorable to the longevity of undesirables. And no sooner was it known up and down the coast that Bogart had started work on his railroad, than the undesirables, generally called beachcombers, came on by every steamer. They dropped off singly and in pairs, having had third-class passages prepaid by helping-hand societies, and bearing letters of enthusiastic recommendation from their consuls.

Bogart soon remarked singular uniformity in their stories, also in their method of procedure. Each had been in hard luck, saw clearly the chance of a lifetime in working for Bogart, and stood manfully to the point of a month's salary in advance so that a right start might be made by properly impressing the natives. Once, possibly twice, Bogart yielded to this natural request; but not after he found that the advance salary spontaneously returned a scene of terrible riot in the native quarter, for which as employer the authorities held him responsible. Not after he had to

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plead with the undesirables to go away to some other place on the next steamer—Aden, Cape Town, Bombay, anywhere,—paying their third-class fares out of his own pocket. In the overheated atmosphere of Dar Abbas this did not tend to cool his temper, and he wrote vigorous letters to the consuls, protesting against their human consignments.

Bogart was the reverse of a hard-hearted man, but experience made him wary of persons traveling on third-class tickets, hard-luck stories, and consular letters of recommendation. He understood it was a kind of pass-on-trouble process, and acted accordingly by urging the undesirables speedily hence to a Frenchman building a dock in Madagascar, and who Bogart felt sure would be glad to advance salaries.

Shortly thereafter, not only steamers, but wind jammers and even Arab *dhows* began to drop undesirables in Madagascar, and the Frenchman grew very angry with Bogart, much as Bogart had done with the consuls. He was given to understand the Frenchman had used the terrible epithet *cochon,* which means pig, also declaring that were it not several hundred miles separated them professional honor could be satisfied only in one way. It rather amused Bogart than otherwise, because Madagascar was out in the Indian Ocean, and the steamer routes made it difficult to ship the undesirables back to Dar Abbas. Besides they preferred to stay in Madagascar, where lounging on the dock works was made agreeable by cool ocean breezes, and there were consuls to see to it they did not suffer from unkind treatment.

But this much concerning the undesirables will explain why Bogart's sympathetic interest was kindled in a little old man who turned up in Dar Abbas, and who ambled into Bogart's office looking for a position, neat and clean shaven, without a hard luck story or a consular letter of recommendation. In marked contrast to the bluff and bluster of the too familiar undesirables, he was so modest spoken that conversation had gone some length before he admitted his American nationality.

"Yes," nodded the little old man in response to a direct question. "That's a fact. I guess we both come from the same country. My name is—is John Marbury. Yes, sir, I was raised in Connecticut, but went West pretty early. Did well

out there for quite a number of years until my health broke down — nervous trouble. Then my physician ordered me to travel. Been traveling mostly ever since."

"Well," remarked Bogart, "I shouldn't have thought Dar Abbas was exactly the place to come to in search of health."

"Why," explained Marbury, "a hot climate seems to agree with me; and with the opening up of this region by your road, I thought there might be something doing. By keeping busy one is liable to forget about health."

"What business were you in?" interrogated Bogart.

"I've been in a good many different kinds of business at one time or another," replied the other somewhat vaguely.

"Did you ever do any railroad construction work?" asked Bogart.

"Well — not exactly."

"Or handle dynamite?" went on Bogart.

The old man started slightly as he swept Bogart with a quick searching look.

"Handle dynamite!" he repeated with emphasis.

"Yes, I mean for blasting out rock. The fact is I'm up against a problem here on that very point."

"Is that so?" came from Marbury with a return to his usual quiet manner. "Well, I may say I'm kind of familiar with the handling of dynamite from experience in the building business. Used to blast out quite a pile of rock from a foundation sometimes."

"Good!" cried Bogart. "You're just the man I'm yearning for. It's this way. We've got to build a bridge over the creek back of the town, and the stone for the supports has to be quarried at a spot about three miles distant. But there isn't a man here I can trust to blast the rock, or who knows how to do so into the right sections. The natives would certainly blow themselves up, and since my last assistant died, as to the rest of the white men who drift in here — "

A gesture comprehensively expressed Bogart's opinion of the undesirables with whom he had been inflicted. The old man passed a thin hand across his mouth, reflected a moment, and nodded.

"You can try me," he said. "I guess I'll prove satisfactory along that line, but I'd just as soon not sign up any contract until I've looked over the ground a bit — I mean demonstrated what I'm worth. How is that for a fair proposition?"

According to the ethics of Dar Abbas, where every one insisted on payment for work still chiefly in the discussion stage, it was an amazingly satisfactory one, and Bogart lost no time in accepting the old man's offer. He presently took Marbury out to the quarry, and explained his requirements. On his part Marbury examined the rock with the eye of an expert, started his gang of coolies to work in a practical fashion, and soon convinced Bogart of his ability to handle dangerous explosives. In a few days Marbury had proved himself such a thoroughly efficient and energetic worker, that Bogart thought he was lucky when the old man tentatively accepted two hundred and fifty rupees a month, at the same time rather wondering that one possessing ill health could keep so busy in the enervating climate of Dar Abbas.

As Bogart's hands were pretty full elsewhere, he presently left Marbury in entire charge of the quarry, merely noticing two rather strange peculiarities in the old man's actions. He insisted upon camping out at the quarry, and when a steamer cast anchor in the harbor he took various means of gaining the description of any white man who landed. Bogart discovered this from a coolie caught watching the landing, when he ought to have been out at the quarry.

In this way several weeks went by, the stone for the bridge supports had been nearly all delivered, and Bogart was thinking of promoting Marbury to superintendent of construction in recognition of excellent service; when the thing happened which shook his faith even in mild old gentlemen who might chance to wander into Dar Abbas.

The usual morning equatorial downpour had given place to a burst of sunshine disclosing a steamer in the harbor. From the steamer a boat put off, bringing to the shore a stranger who promptly sought Bogart. Though his credentials bore American consular recommendation, the stranger had not come on a third-class ticket, and he didn't ask for a job with a month's salary in advance. That reassured Bogart, who at first encounter

was for urging the stranger to go right on to the dock-building Frenchman in Madagascar.

"I understand," began the stranger, "you have a man here called Tyson."

"No one here of that name," replied Bogart.

"Well, Bostwick."

"Nor Bostwick."

"Then Janion."

"Never heard of a Janion in Dar Abbas."

The stranger looked disappointed, but was still persistent.

"See here, Mr. Bogart, I guess I'm not mistaken in believing a mild-mannered old man landed here within the last two or three months?"

"Why do you mean old man Marbury?"

"Ah! Marbury this time," exclaimed the stranger. "He limps slightly, does he not?"

"Why, yes, now I think of it, but it hasn't hindered him doing mighty good work out at the quarry."

"So he's working in a quarry," the stranger rubbed his hands in apparent satisfaction. "Well, Mr. Bogart, you will do me a great favor if you show me the way to the quarry. I have some important news for Marbury."

As it occurred to Bogart he had not heard from the old man for a couple of days, he offered to pilot the stranger out in rickshaws. On the road Bogart enthused over the old man's energy in an effort to extract further information from the extremely reticent stranger, but all he gained was complete agreement that Marbury was a very capable man, unsurpassed in a certain field of operation. They had barely reached the quarry when Bogart saw all work had been suspended, the coolies lying around basking in the sun.

"Where is Mr. Marbury?" he demanded of the native foreman.

"Gone, Master," replied the foreman, pointing to the dense mass of jungle rising behind the quarry.

"Gone!" repeated Bogart.

"Gone!" shouted the stranger, leaping out of the rickshaw.

"When did he leave?" demanded Bogart.

"Before sunrise yesterday. He went away with a party of ivory hunters, and said he would not return."

"That's queer," expressed Bogart. "I owe him a month's salary."

"Not at all, confound him!" returned the stranger. "That old rascal seems to know when I'm close on his heels. He's given me the slip in Hongkong, Batavia, Melbourne, Bombay, Cape Town, at fifty points, but I made sure I'd grip him here."

"What do you want him for?" questioned Bogart.

"Safe-blowing and robbing the U. S. Mail. I guess he was figuring out some scheme to hold up Dar Abbas."

Bogart whistled softly.

"Then that accounts for his familiarity with dynamite and making such an A1 quarryman. But I guess he's thrown you off the trail this time."

"Not on your life," cried the stranger. "I'm going right on after him."

"What, in there?" Bogart nodded toward the jungle.

"Why not?" demanded the stranger.

"Fever — wild beasts — poisonous reptiles," remarked Bogart significantly."

"Dead or alive, I'll get him," said the stranger.

Bogart shook his head dubiously.

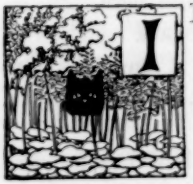
"Africa is rather a large continent," he added.

"Well, you'll see," concluded the stranger.

Bogart did witness the stranger stock up with provisions, hire an Arab guide and a couple of native porters. He escorted the party to the edge of the jungle, and wished the stranger personal luck that he might come out alive. And that was all, save that the Arab guide and porters returned in a few days, saying they had not agreed to go on into an unknown country. But their white master was determined to keep in pursuit of the other man forever. Therefore they judged there must be a blood feud of many generations between them.

The Organist of Sulzbach.*

BY FRED R. WEBBER.



IN the little German town of Sulzbach, Josef Rudolstadt was an important man. For more than fifty years he had been organist of the village church. And to be the organist of the village church of Sulzbach is a distinction second only to that of being burgomaster or pastor. But both organ and organist had become so old that even the ultra-conservative townspeople saw that a change was necessary. To buy a new organ was not a difficult matter, but to discharge the old organist, now too feeble to fill the position, was another thing.

A popular subscription was taken, and the townspeople saw visions of an organ that would be the pride of the lower Rhine-country. Builders were called from Brussels, and in the course of time the organ was built, brought to Sulzbach and set up.

On the day that the work was completed, the question of the old organist's dismissal was settled, for it was learned that Josef Rudolstadt had died during the night.

Now another question arose. Who was to play the new organ? Such a position of honor could not be given to the first man who applied for it. True, Sulzbach had a dozen aspiring organists, yet only two seemed eligible. One was Pierre Esquerre and the other was Karl Rudolstadt, son of the old organist.

Pierre was a Frenchman, and had lived in the town for years. His house was in the lower part of the town, near the Rhine. This, together with the fact that Pierre was a musician of exceptional ability, was all that the people of the town knew about him, for he was a man who kept much to himself. Gossip had never hit upon any explanation of his past. Just why so talented a man

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should be content to live in a village and teach music was a matter that had never been explained.

Karl Rudolstadt was a man of considerable popularity. He had spent all his life in the town, was well known and well liked. Karl had inherited his musical talent from his father, and had spent years in training, under the direction of the old organ master.

Such a man was fitted for the position, his friends insisted. But there were others who were determined that the Frenchman's great skill should not be ignored. The question agitated Sulzbach for days. It was discussed with much vehemence by the townsmen, and whenever a group of people were seen on the street, it was reasonably certain that the topic of conversation was the Esquerre-Rudolstadt controversy.

Finally a plan was evolved and agreed upon. It was decided to have a trial day, and the rival musicians were each to play. The townspeople were to be the judges, and the selection of the organist was to be by popular vote.

For days the rival musicians practiced on the big organ.

Finally the trial day arrived. It had been declared a public holiday, and every man who could brought his family to the church to hear the candidates play.

The pastor of the church announced the conditions. Each organist was to have the privilege of playing whatever he wished. If either of the two refused to compete, the choice was to go to his rival. Every person above the age of eighteen was entitled to one vote, and their choice would decide the question of such moment.

The name of Pierre Esquerre was announced. There was much suppressed excitement when the Frenchman took his place at the organ and arranged his stops.

The people of Sulzbach had never heard such playing. Pierre had chosen only one number. He started with the soft toned stops of the organ, gradually added to his registration, building up his theme as he went, until he reached the climax in a thunder of diapasons that brought the entire audience to their feet.

He left the organ bench flushed, and with a look of conscious triumph. The people were speechless for a time. Then they

looked at one another in amazement, for when had any of them heard such playing! They discussed it in suppressed whispers. It was wonderful! But others insisted that Karl Rudolstadt could outdo the Frenchman.

The name of the young German was announced, and the people were all attention. But the rival candidate did not appear.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, then half an hour. The people grew restless. Then it was suggested that Pierre be elected, for by the terms of the trial, Rudolstadt's absence made him ineligible. The German's friends protested, because they knew that Karl was no coward, and that he was not absent voluntarily. Messengers were sent out, but the man could not be found.

A vote was taken and the Frenchman elected.

Days passed, and Karl Rudolstadt did not return. The town was agitated for a while, for it was not usual for a man to leave his family and friends in such a manner, especially in a community where generations live and die, and no one thinks of moving away. Gradually the matter was forgotten, and in the course of time it became a tradition of the village.

The organ and the organist were famed throughout the region, and many tales are told of the wonderful skill of the organist.

Finally, before a fest-day, it was decided to repair the organ. The French organist, now grown old, had kept it in repair, but now it needed a thorough overhauling, and the builders were sent for and arrived.

That night Pierre Esquerre was seen entering the church.

On the following day the master-builder who was repairing the organ, left the church in great excitement and summoned one of the town officials. The builder led the way to the church, and motioned for the selectman to follow him to the organ loft.

"Put your foot on that pedal," the builder said.

The selectman obeyed, but there was no sound.

"What is wrong with the organ? Why will that pedal not sound?"

"Follow me and you'll see."

The master-builder hurriedly led the way to the back of the organ and up a long ladder to a platform. Below were the rows of great, open pedal-pipes.

The builder lowered his light into one of them and motioned for the town official to look.

"A man's feet!" the selectman cried.

After a hurried discussion, a number of workmen were called, and the big pipe was lifted out and laid on the floor of the organ loft. Then the workmen drew from the inside of the pipe the body of the old Frenchman. The men were horrified. No one cared especially for the sinister old organist, but the manner of his death was terrible.

One of the men, examining the body, gave a cry, and called the attention of his companions to a rope clutched in the hand of the dead Pierre.

They pulled the rope out of the pipe, and at its end was a bundle. The selectman's eyes flashed meaningly.

"I have always suspected," he said, "now we shall see."

He cut the leather thongs and unrolled a faded coat of peculiar make that even the younger men remembered as belonging to the missing organist. Inside of this was another bundle, in which was a wallet, a watch and several smaller articles of jewelry. In the case of the watch was engraved,

"Karl Rudolstadt, Sulzbach, 1817."

The story was clear to all. Before the trial, the selectman explained to the organ builder, the Frenchman had killed his rival and had made way with his body, possibly sinking it in the river. He had hidden in the organ pipe the dead man's coat and valuables, which would have identified him, should the body be found. When the builders came, the Frenchman, alarmed at the possible discovery of his crime, tried to remove the incriminating articles from the organ pipe, had lost his balance and had fallen in himself to a terrible death.

The excitement in Sulzbach, when the news was learned, was great, and many reproaches were heaped on the memory of the dead Frenchman.

The organ is the pride of the village, even to-day, and the townspeople never grow tired of telling the occasional visitor of its unusual story.

The Transmigration of a Motive.*

BY HARRIET GAYLORD.

REDERIC BRINLEY was at his work in a Fifth Avenue publishing house when the telegram came. As the messenger boy made his way through the long aisle, Brinley instinctively replaced his books on the rack and drew down the cover of his desk preparatory to leaving. He opened the yellow envelope merely as a matter of form.

"Harvey sinking rapidly. He asks for you. Mary."

All necessary arrangements for his probable absence had been made earlier in the day, so now he had only to put on his overcoat and report his departure at the office. Oppressed by the sense that his journey led to the borderland of death, he aged perceptibly as he walked through to Sixth Avenue and boarded a trolley car. He had known that morning when he left Harvey Arnett's room that the sundering of the close friendship was at hand, and yet the certainty of death's immediate approach was a shock. All power except that of mechanical motion slumbered within him. The brain resumed its action only when he was in the train passing out from Hoboken.

Harvey was dying. Soon he and Mary Arnett would be left alone, the motive of their lives annihilated; left to face an empty old age, the link which bound them shattered; left with only a beautiful, heart-breaking memory of the friendship in which no one of the three had ever been a crowd. He recalled that other telegram Mary had sent him in '64:

"Harvey wounded at the front. Can you come with me to Washington?"

Together they had brought home the soldier brother and friend with the injured spine, to live his heroic semi-invalid life. After Brinley's sister Adelaide had married and gone to live in California, the three had made their home together. The love of the

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two men was indeed passing the love of woman, and to her brother Mary was as mother, wife, sister, all. The joy of their service had bound her to Brinley in an exquisite friendship, until now he who had given their life incentive for forty years, must die. As Brinley's thought leaped forward to the grim, practical details of the next few days, his face grew pinched and gray. Not a large man, and yet too strong of physique to be effeminate, the delicate fineness of his clear-cut features, the sensitiveness of the mouth, placed him outside the ranks of the aggressive, the men of strong passions, and made one understand why his life had satisfied his aspirations; why he was stunned as he realized that the rich years of plenty were now dwindling away to a famine of soul.

He felt years older when he reached his station. The house was not far distant, but he stepped stiffly into a cab, possessed with the dread of being too late. The maid opened the door as she saw him coming up the path. Sarah, too, had grown old in the service of Harvey, and her eyes were red with weeping as she answered Brinley's mute, questioning glance.

"He is still alive. . . . Oh — Mr. Frederic!"

The doctor, coming down the stairs, hastened to say:

"He has rallied slightly. I shall come back about six. I fear the end will come to-night."

With the preternatural acuteness of those in whose ears Death's clangors are sounding, Harvey had heard Brinley's footfall as soon as he entered the house. The welcome in his great, gaunt eyes stabbed the heart of the man for whom that beacon-light of home would shine no more. A strange, unfamiliar thing happened in his throat; then he made a desperate, iron call on his manhood. He felt his lips smile and heard his voice say:

"Well, old man, how is it? Feeling better?"

Great-hearted impatience at pretense dawned on the face of the man who had done with aught but truth forever. He whispered:

"Check-mate at last. Got to go on the long journey. Can't take you and Mary. It's not a square deal, I know, but I wasn't consulted. You'll have to make it a duet now, my boy and girl."

Mary, sweet, tiny, her white hair tumbled, her whole life of

love and devotion summoned to her thin, deeply lined face to sweeten this last night on earth of her best beloved, smiled as an angel might who cuddled in her arms a new-born, new-dead child, and winged with it away to Paradise.

"You can't really leave us, Harvey," she said. "You'll be in every breath we draw and give us a home feeling for the life beyond. It sweetens the parting and will throw out a search-light on eternity for us. Death will have no more sting because you have gone before."

The dying man's eyes yearned as she spoke.

"I am so selfish that I want you to come, too, you and Fred. We three belong!"

It was hours later, past midnight, when he reached out for their hands, held them together in both his own, and whispered:

"My dearest, good-bye!"

After that, unconsciousness, and at dawn, the great sleep.

They bore their grief because they must, — bore it with something of exaltation so long as his empty tabernacle still remained in their home. They knew the hour for sorrow and loneliness must dawn, but the dumb first shock had stunned them beyond realization.

The night before the funeral, Brinley for the first time thought of the practical question of their future, Mary's and his. His soul was simple, unconventional, and it might not have occurred to him then that they could not go on living as they had for thirty years now the motive of their life together had been removed, had he not heard one of the neighbors say to the nurse:

"I suppose they will marry now. I have often wondered why they didn't years ago."

His first thought was amusement at so preposterous a notion. Why should they have married when they had Harvey? Then he was irritated at the intrusion of gossip at such a time. Why could not everything remain as it was? Surely the two who had so deeply loved the brother might also grieve together. Yet, after all, could they afford to defy conventions? He must think for Mary more than for himself. No, plainly not; they could not live together alone. But to leave Mary in her sorrow was equally impossible. She was entwined in every fibre of his life

with her sweet, inspiring gentleness, her generous friendship. She knew all his ways; he was second only to Harvey in her life. Perhaps she would find some one to keep them company. Ah! that was why, with her woman's foresight, she had asked the nurse to remain for a fortnight to get a good rest. He had felt impatient at the time, preferring to be alone with Mary and the thought of their dead. Miss Evans was their chaperon. But when she must leave, what then? Why wasn't old Sarah sufficient? She was, but the neighbors would not think so. What should be done? Marriage? That was absurd. He was sixty-three. Mary was sixty. However much their hearts might still be lingering in the summer prime, in the eyes of the world they were old beyond romance. Should they spoil a beautiful exalted friendship by a spurious, exacting, earthly tie? Never!

At least he felt so at first, but the next night when they sat in awful, crushing loneliness before the fire, making a pitiful attempt to be cheerful, each for the other's sake, he realized how infinitely worse it would be to suffer alone. They had been silent a long moment when Mary uttered his thought. It was often so with them.

"That you have been to him all man could be and are left to me now makes the loneliness ache less, I think."

Suddenly it became clear. There was no other way. His hand covered hers as it lay on the arm of her chair, and he said:

"Marry me some day very soon, Mary, and then we can always love his memory together."

She turned her pretty, flushed old face toward him, keenly searching his eyes, which sank, confused, before her gaze.

"You dear!" she said at last, "you dear! I never thought you would be worldly wise enough to notice. I thought I should have to broach the subject first."

"Then you will marry me?" he asked, trying to keep disappointment out of his voice even as, a moment later, he tried to crush back relief from his face as she answered:

"Marry you? No, you blessed goose! Why should we spoil our lives? You don't want to marry, neither do I. We are both old maids to the core." Then she grew sweetly serious, and he saw her thin, blue-veined hands tremble as she added: "I think

we both want to go to God and Harvey as we are. How should we ever dare face them if we had murdered the most perfect thing we know?"

"But couldn't we keep friends even if we were married?" he asked lamely.

"Now, Fred, don't! You know it would spoil everything and you shrink from it as much as I do. Let us be honest. It would be sacrilege."

"But what shall we do?"

"That is difficult. We can't live apart and we can't live together. I am trying so hard to find a way — after Miss Evans goes."

They sank into one of the long silences which enshrines the richest intercourse of friends, and hearts and minds traveled the same path. At last they turned to each other again, distress and failure written on their faces. Brinley spoke first, with an attempt at a smile:

"It's the only way, Mary. No one else would make me take quinine and mix me a hot toddy when I came in wet. I should die of pneumonia the first week away from you."

"No one else would put a nosegay at my plate every morning and drink three cups of my coffee. I should be a useless, unlovely old woman in two days. I simply can't lose you; Harvey wouldn't want me to."

"I hadn't thought of that. Of course he wouldn't. Why I mustn't go and leave you to forge for yourself. You're used to having men around. Oh, the preposterous conventions! At our age we must either have a chaperon or be married! No, there's only one way, Mary."

"I can't see any other myself."

"But, Mary —" he hesitated — "don't dread it so much. We will just square ourselves with the gossips, but you shall be free in every way. Just friends, Mary. It is the only way."

She laughed softly.

"It is well neither of us is sensitive. We have stated that we have no choice innumerable times during the last half hour. Let us sleep over it, and anyway we have a few days of grace. Dear Harvey! Does he realize our difficulty to-night, do you

suppose? Do you remember our first night in this house?"

The rest of the evening was spent in loving reminiscence. At last Brinley said:

"Play to me, Mary."

Her lip quivered. Harvey had loved her music. But she went to the piano bravely and improvised for a few moments; then her fingers wandered questioningly into Schumann's *Warum*. After that she began *Consolation,* but she had overestimated her courage. The tears streamed down her cheeks for the first time since she had girded up her soul to make her brother's last days on earth unclouded cheer. She kept on playing, hoping Brinley would not see, would not suffer in her suffering, until at last her hands crashed nerveless on the keys in one wild discord of protest. Quickly she raised them to hide her face. Brinley rose and came to her, placing his arm about her shoulder awkwardly, as if she were man and brother.

"Don't, Mary, don't! Harvey will feel unhappy where he is if we are not brave, — if you give way and suffer."

"Then he will be very unhappy if we marry," she sobbed. "It is cowardly and wicked of us when we don't want to."

"Don't think about that to-night. I hear Miss Evans coming in. Shall I ask for her congratulations?"

The attempt to sting her back to self-control was successful. She sprang up and faced him.

"Fred, if you dare! Oh, you bad boy! You're just teasing me. Quick, turn the light low."

When the nurse entered she was seated calmly in the soft shadow of the lamplight.

For a week nothing more was said about the apparently inevitable change in their relationship, but Brinley was irritable and Mary nervous and distracted. Each detected the other in furtive, apprehensive glances. So far as possible they avoided tête-à-têtes and hovered near their chaperon. Finally he came in one evening to find her alone. She suddenly closed the book over which she was bending and slipped it under a magazine.

"Too late, Mary. You're caught. Confess!"

She laughed a confused, youthful laugh. She was and always would be absurdly young in heart.

"Then see!" she said, holding up the Prayer Book. "It might be wise for you to study it yourself and see what you think."

Resignedly he reached for the book and found it opened at "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony," which he read carefully from beginning to end, brightening perceptibly as he took off his spectacles and looked at her.

"It's not so bad as I expected," he said. "I thought I had to promise much more. I think I can do all that. Can you?"

"Oh, I don't know, I suppose so, but there's the sacrilege. Still God and Harvey know we can't do anything else. If we had married at twenty the sacred thing would have been the marriage, but now it's the friendship. We must tear down the life-work we've builded and put up a flimsy sham — a marriage of convenience."

"What do you say to getting it over at once?" His tone was unqualifiedly lugubrious. So was hers as she assented:

"I suppose it would worry us less when we were actually married."

"Where shall it be, Mary?"

She blushed vividly.

"At the Little Church Around the Corner, of course. It's the resort of all youngsters who are unable to get 'their parents' consent.' Do you suppose the clergyman will challenge our ages?"

"If you look at him in that fashion, he will think you are twelve."

"Ah! will you still say pretty things to me when I am married? O, Fred, how do we know we won't be struck with the honeymoon fever and become a burden to our acquaintances? No fools like old fools!"

"How do we know? We don't know. We've got to experiment with life. Till now it has been laid out for us, but at our age, we must take our first plunge for ourselves. There's comfort though in the thought that we don't suffer alone. We'll try to make the blow as light as possible for each other."

"Fred, you are such a comfort! I don't know any one else who would be so unobjectionable as a husband."

"Thank you. That brings us back to the business at hand.

When shall we offer up our few remaining years to Mrs. Moloch Grundy?"

"Miss Evans leaves next Tuesday."

"Come in town to-morrow noon and have it over. We will not put it in the papers till Tuesday. That will give us time to get used to the thought."

"If one has a disagreeable thing to do, the sooner it is over the better, I suppose."

"Then you will come?"

"I think so."

Next morning her eyes were heavy and red; Brinley's face strained and unhappy. Conversation languished. In the interest of Miss Evans' rest-cure they breakfasted alone. No reference was made to the impending tragedy. Sarah brought in the letters as Brinley began his third cup of coffee. He looked them over, passed two to Mary; then sat staring at one of his own.

"It's from Los Angeles," he announced, mildly, "but it's not Adelaide's handwriting. I have not heard from her for two months. Of course, though, they would telegraph if anything were wrong?" He looked questioningly across to Mary.

"There's one way to find out," she suggested.

"Of course! of course!"

He tore open the envelope, and as he began to read, started violently. With an inaudible exclamation he attempted to take Mary into his confidence. Then he read on, paying no heed to her anxious: "What did you say, Fred?"

His face passed through many shades of emotion but he was too absorbed to reply. When he had reached the end, he sat quite still, gazing at her over his spectacles.

"Well!" he said, "well! Who'd have thought it? Well!"

"How can I tell who would have thought it till I know what it is?" asked Mary, with some acidity.

He started and came to himself.

"No? Why, no, of course not. One doesn't know about the interposition of Providence until it has come to pass. Why didn't we think of Adelaide?"

"Adelaide? You mean to live with us? Why, she couldn't leave John."

"But John died two weeks ago in the asylum and her long vigil is over. Now she is having trouble with her eyes and fears she is going blind. She wants to come to New York to consult specialists. She asks if she can live with me. What do you think?"

"Live with you? With *us*, you mean. Why, it's too good to be true. We needn't get married!"

"Do you mean to jilt me?" The twinkle in his eye belied his lugubrious voice.

"Jilt you? Why God has sent us a new chaperon! Our lives, our tempers, and perhaps our eternal salvation have been in jeopardy, and you talk of jilting! How I wish Harvey were here to be glad, too! You can die a bachelor and I an old maid and we shall not be ridiculous at the judgment day!"

She rose from the table.

"Come with me quick, come!"

When he reached the library he found her at the piano.

"Sing with all your might!" she commanded.

She struck a few chords and he knew. Their voices rang out with the quaver of old age which youthful hearts could not drown.

"Praise God from Whom all blessings flow" — they sang to the end triumphantly. Upstairs their chaperon awoke and listened.

"I didn't know they had family prayers. Strange they should sing that and her brother dead only a week."

Mary rose, flushed and smiling like a girl, again saying:

"Come!"

In the dining-room she poured out two glasses of rare wine. Raising hers in her delicate old hand, she cried:

"Here's to friends for keeps!"

"Amen."

Afterward they stood holding each other's hands, gazing into each other's eyes in simple joy, until Mary spoke in hushed, awed tones:

"We don't have to be married and we have a new motive. Isn't God good?"

The Indian and the Appetite.*

BY GILBERT HINK.

OME day when you are passing through Shawnee, Pottowatomie County, Oklahoma, you may see an Indian hustling freight at the Frisco depot. That Indian is Highpocket Smith and the victim of an assault and battery by fate.

Somewhere there is a divinity that shapes our odds and ends, untangle them if we may. The modiste for this particular part of Highpocket's life costume gave him what was left over. Running afoul of his life line and making short circuits is the story of a youthful Kentuckian, who emulated Lincoln and took Horace Greeley, seriously; a love-lorn lass and the county clerk at Middlesboro, Kentucky.

With many knots to be unraveled on that other and fairer shore, I will give you the story of Highpocket. It is the story of an innocent bystander, hoist on his own petard.

Perhaps you have read Uncle Tom's Cabin. In that book, you will remember, each character of any importance is given his chapter in turn. This was probably due to the Jim Crow laws of that day, but the idea is not bad, for it insures to the different characters the individuality and privacy that is their due.

Thus and therefore, the characters who have consented to appear in this drama of the Cherokee Strip will remain in their respective chapters until the paths of all intersect, when they will appear in the grand finale, with a full stage setting, just before the curtain is rung down.

Act 1: (Wherein the homespun hero starts out to make his mark in the world.)

John Paul Hurst possessed a bass voice, deep and resonant.

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He could stand in the back lot where he fed his father's flocks and merrily call the cattle home from the back pasture, a mile away. When he lifted up his voice for the return of lowing kine, long overdue, the mountains of Fluke County, Kentucky (Yes, it's a recital flavored with rhododendron and illicit liquor), reechoed the tones down hill and vale.

John Paul was content — or satisfied (you should have had this in your high-school English) until he reached the age of twenty. Ambition beyond the acquirement of precision in matters of marksmanship had never fevered his dreams. One day, a neighbor told John Paul that with his bass voice as an asset, there was fame and fortune to be won as a lawyer. With that bass voice, the neighbor argued, murderers could be set free and farm boundaries, hopelessly entangled with the meanderings of creeks and stones set in the middle of county roads, could be made straight and feudless.

From that moment, John Paul began a quiet race for the supreme court bench. He had read of Lincoln, the native son who plowed and philosophied, split rails and infinitives, and read Blackstone by the glow of the fire for which he had gathered the wood. He secured a copy of Blackstone's commentaries and lost himself in the mazes of the common law, never to be rescued.

One day in early fall, after the crops had been given the usual encouragement toward maturing and the women of the hills had begun molding the bullets — for man or beast — John Paul packed the ancestral trunk, which had come over in the steerage, when the mayflowers were in bloom, passed through the county seat to have his hair cut and purchase an eye-shade, and went forth to matriculate in a night-blooming law school.

Where the matriculation fee is all the preliminary knowledge that is needed, it is folly to be wise. John Paul passed the examination by paying the term fees in advance and entered upon his studies, complying with the rules of "Who's Who in America," which was authorized to state that: "In 1900 he entered ——— university and concluded his course and was admitted to the bar in 1902" — which gives you an insight as to the length of the course.

The long hard fight of the class against the intricacies of the

Rule in Shelley's Case and the inexorableness of the rule in Kelly's place will be left out — (the first rule pertains to real estate and the latter regulation was to drink and get out before becoming too drunk). John Paul conquered the first rule and let his classmates be conquered by the other.

The battle of intellect against the Statute of Frauds was finally won. John Paul grew to be the leader of his class. He had use only for the knotty problems of law. Much of his time was spent in manufacturing a new patentable set of legal ethics.

He out-ethiced old Ethictetus himself, or whoever it was that started the original crusade against turning the jack from the bottom.

When the class stood up on commencement night, in rented robes of pedantry, to receive diplomas of graduation, John Paul exuded legal ethics from every pore. His code was highly appetizing. It was a combination of the Golden Rule, Moore's Utopia, the Sermon on the Mount, and Socialism. It was the live-and-let-live doctrine applied to the profession of law.

With this faculty of loving his neighbor better than he loved himself, and with a supply of law-books, Congressional Records and a diploma written in Latin, our hero took Horace Greeley at his word and went West in a day-coach to the land of the Indians.

He located in a town that had one lawyer to every seven ordinary lay workers, but this did not deter John Paul. (Had he become deterred at this, the story would never have been written. Heroes in stories of this type are never deterred as long as the typewriter ribbon holds out to turn.)

Signs of attorneys at law and lawyers — the difference in the size of the dose, fee rather — protruded from every stairway along Main Street. They were gaudy, but otherwise silent hawkers for the men who waited in their offices for the summons to go out to pick mortgages, break wills and other tasks which promised remuneration.

John Paul secured no gaudy sign. It was simple, ethical and hidden between the emblazoned signs of a dentist and a painless corn doctor — the dentist was healthy, too — and conveyed to the passers-by the information that "J. P. Hurst,

lawyer" had an office upstairs over the Blue Front drug store.

One peep into the office of this partitioner of the sheep and the goats in things legal, and the scene will change. In the office he had a desk, two chairs, a waste-paper basket, an insurance company calendar and hope for the future. It may be a long wait. Let us go out quietly and let him wait undisturbed.

Act 2: (Wherein is introduced the girl and the hat.)

There is really no need of putting in an act about the girl. She might have been left out entirely and then the gentlemen readers might have removed their coats or smoked. But this is one of the rare instances where it really pays to have a woman around. She adds to the length of the story and is really no trouble at all.

May Lathram (John Fox, Jr., wrote about a girl named June, — this girl is a month older than June) lived in Fluke County and encouraged John Paul Hurst's ambition to become a second Lincoln, but to leave the theatre just before he was shot. She was willing that he should go away to school for such information, educational and otherwise, as would fit him for the career of a highly successful lawyer.

On the night before he went away, they trysted for a little while under the tryst-berry tree down by the spring, which for the sake of neutrality is on the line which divides the farms of Amos Hurst and Benton Lathram, the fathers respectively of John Paul and May.

They held hands in the soft moonlight — not the fathers, but the lovers — and talked of the day when he would come back and take her away. She was willing to wait, she said, until he should have made his mark, and would wait willingly, patiently, lovingly, against the day of his return.

Paul thought her unusually winsome on that parting night. (This is to continue only for a few lines and then back to earth again.) In his honor she had worn her newest gingham frock — all mountain girls wear gingham frocks, in books — and as an added touch to her wild beauty, she wore her new fall hat. Not an elaborate hat, mind you, but pretty, artistic and — cheap. The creation was built along ethical lines, therefore it pleased Paul,

and with a burst of feeling he told her that when he came back with money in the bank and all pockets, he wanted her to put on the hat and they would go down to Middlesboro and be married in the office of the county clerk — in style. He admitted that it was an odd sort of request, but he pleaded with her to respect his wishes in the matter. He would always think of her as wearing that hat, he declared, and he would love the hat because of the sentiment attached to it — because she had worn it on their parting night. When she had promised to wear the hat on their wedding day he kissed her and they parted, each looking into the future. She went home to wait until John Paul should return to claim her and the hat as his very own. Let us walk out quietly and let her wait — undisturbed.

Act 3: (Introducing the Indian and the Appetite.)

Highpocket Smith resembled Hiawatha in a single particular. He was copper-skinned, and there his resemblance to Longfellow's romantic wooer ceased. Highpocket belonged to that later generation of Indians, who lose their allotted lands like gentlemen; who have discarded the moccasin for the patent leather shoes with red buttons; the gay blankets of the aborigines for the overalls; the headpiece of feathers for the ordinary hat of commerce; and election bets and a penchant for scalps for an appetite for hot tamales. Highpocket differed from his tribesmen, however, on this latter proposition. Not that he was not passionately fond of tamales. He was, but his particular obsession in the line of epicurean delights was the unctious combination of liver and onions.

Back in Biblical days before Indian agents were discovered, some youthful gourmand swapped his birthright for a mess of pottage. This character of Scriptural days had a prototype in Highpocket, who would have mortgaged his half-section of land for his fill of liver and onions almost any day.

Bill Peasley, owner, proprietor, chef, steward, waiter, and sometimes bouncer of the Omega Café was Highpocket's patron saint. No sooner would Highpocket enter the door of the Omega Café, than Bill would busy himself with preparing the liver and onions. No words were necessary. It was an

unwritten law. The two went together and Bill never forgot.

It must have been Friday, the thirteenth, when it happened, but one morning Highpocket met a real estate dealer, who formerly did the same thing in faro. The dealer offered the Indian $500 for the half-section of land and Highpocket refused the offer.

"Well, I'm going to have that land, Mr. Indian," snarled the dealer. "I've got a mortgage on it that was made before you got it, and I'm going to get it."

The real estate dealer turned on his heel — he's the villain of this story — and walked away.

Highpocket was puzzled. He hadn't heard of any mortgages on his land, but he had known of Indians who lost half-sections on slimmer pretexts.

He wanted advice in his day of trouble and bethought himself of Bill Peasley, and he walked down the street to the Omega Café. Just as he opened the door, the real estate dealer passed.

"Wait, you Indian," said the real estate dealer. "I'll get that half-section yet" — and he hissed the words between his false teeth — "just you wait." Let us go out quietly and let Highpocket wait — undisturbed.

Act 4: (The round-up.)

"Your plan is fraudulent, you insult me," the lawyer was saying. "You ask me to frame up a mortgage and foreclose on a man's land, when he doesn't even owe you anything. You are aware, are you not, that the ethics of the law will not permit me to do that?"

"But," interrupted the caller, "he will lose the land anyway. He's an Indian, what right has he got to it? If I get it, I'll give you half. It means a fortune for us both, for there's oil, lots of oil, in that half-section, and you look to me like you need the money — "

"Yes, God knows I need the money — " broke in the lawyer, "for three months I've eaten but two meals a day. God, but I'm hungry right now, but the ethics of the profession will not let me stoop to this, I'll starve first."

* * * * * * *

From across the street came the penetrating odor of liver and onions. Somebody in the Omega Café was about to eat, ethics or no ethics. The fragrance of the viands smote the nostrils of a hungry exponent of the golden rule.

"Fine grub, Bill," grunted Highpocket Smith as he devoured the inseparable compound.

"That liver and onions smells fine," vouchsafed the hungry lawyer and then —

"Damn me, I'm tired of starving. I'll fix up the mortgage to eucher that Indian out of his broad acres. What's his name?"

"Highpocket Smith," replied the real estate dealer.

* * * * * * *

"Well, I'll be derned," remarked the county clerk in his office at Middlesboro, Kentucky, to his assistant: "Wasn't that a funny-looking hat for a bride to wear? Why, they used to wear that kind of bonnets when I wasn't more than knee-high to a duck."

The Cheap Skate.*

BY JOSEPH BROWN COOKE.

EVERYBODY knew that Semple was a simple-minded soul. He was too true to be trustworthy. He meandered along the macadam of life in a manner mighty momentous. But nobody ever guessed that he was a good sport.

And so, when Semple said he wanted to get next to Nastursia, everybody lit up and grinned.

Nastursia was a grafter. She was a sweet-scented, soulful little vanity bag, who manicured the No. 10 Visible Writing outfit in the front office all day and angled for table d'hote dinners at night. She had never lived west of Thoid Avenyeh in her life, she was a perfect lady, and she didn't care a damn. Wasn't that nice of Nasturtia?

This part ought to be in a foot-note, but the Editor says that foot-notes are barred in straight fiction. This is sure straight — nothing crooked about Nasturtia! Her real name is not Nastursia at all — it's Nancy. At first I thought the Editor didn't want this fact made public. I thought he was interested. But I found he wasn't — much, not over a cent a word anyway. However, all I want to say is that Nastursia thought "Nancy" too commonplace, and got her new name out of a garden where Nastursia grow. *Sing.* Nasturtium. No, don't *sing* it, child; it means *singular,* and it *is* singular, too!

Now you know all that you really ought to know about Nastursia, especially if you are young and trusting. So, we'll get right along with the story. In fact, we must! The secret of success in short-story writing is *action!* We must get action! All the mail-order courses say so. And we *do* get it, too! Every time! Occasionally at the cashier's window; usually at the "car-going-down" door. But you bet we get action somehow!

So simple Semple sidled up to Nastursia. He said:

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"Miss Mooney" (that's her other real name). "Miss Mooney, we've known each other so long and — er — so pleasantly that I — er — wondered. . . . It's a trifle unconventional perhaps, but I — er — know a jolly little Bohemian place — just artists and writers and . . ."

You see, he was trying to ask her to go to dinner with him. And she understood. Her beautiful head, crowned with its glorious masses of Titian hair, bent forward a trifle over the keys. She was sure swell, from her switch to her shoe-strings.

Semple simply smiled.

She dropped her eyes modestly to the floor, — picked them up and re-inserted them, deftly. Then she whispered, softly:

"Ain't you th' sassy one! Yuh know I never go out with no man, 'ceptin' muh gen'mun fren. But I feel that I can trust yoo-oo!"

It was said! She would go! It was said so simply, so artlessly, so ingenuously, that she never turned a hair under her invisible net. There was no affectation about Nasturtia. Her words had come so directly from her heart that her brain had been free to act quite independently and, even as she spoke, she typed four lines of an order for six thousand pairs of lumberman's socks, to be shipped to Seattle.

Let us hurry on. He was waiting for her at the employees' exit. (*Entrance* in the morning, you know. Accuracy of terms is essential to success.)

He grabbed her elbow and, leaning toward her, intoxicated by the elusive fragrance of her silken hair, whispered, hoarsely:

"Come, Nasturtia, the car will soon be here."

"Cadillac?" she breathed, nestling close to him with the trustfulness of a little child.

"No, we ain't goin' there this time, little girl," he murmured. "Them places is all right, but I want teh show you a little joint that *everybody* ain't on to. We get a Fourt' Avenyeh car right at this corner."

Foot-notes are barred in straight fiction, but I want to say at this point, that I could have made the preceding paragraphs much stronger if the Editor had not protested. Reading notices are barred, too. If either the Cadillac Hotel or the Cadillac

Motor Car Company wishes to insult me, it must not be. I might play both ends against the middle. But I would not. (My telephone number is in the book.)

The action has been going on all the time. The car is nearing Grace Church. You know Grace. Pretty good joke, that! I got it out of one of the quarter magazines. They're the only ones really worth reading. They make you feel young again, and take you back to the days of your happy, happy childhood without an effort.

The car stopped. Nastursia and Semple alighted. In English they hopped off. They went — well, I'm not going to say where this place is. It's a quiet little place, frequented by artists, models, literary people, and others (booze-fighters, counter-jumpers, has-beens, thinks-they-were, *et al.*, — see back of dictionary). Few people know of it — much to the owner's disgust. It has an atmosphere of its own. You just bet it has!

Action all the time. Nastursia and Semple are walking rapidly up the street. They trip up the steps. (Nasty trips down, but we must not blame her — there was a special sale of nearsilk hosiery at — no, nothing doing, reading notices barred.) They enter. Quick work here. Semple gets it. The table in the corner, by the window. No, child, he doesn't *buy* the window! He gets a *table, in* the corner, *near* the window. (Distinctness of diction imperative.) He backs Nastursia up against the wall with easy grace and seats himself opposite her. She can see the whole room. All he can see is the Pomeranian complexion carefully massaged into her finely chiseled features. (That's pretty subtle. Pompeian people please answer. Page rates on application. We can meet at the house of Panza.)

The girl is sweetly sweet. Semple says:

"Garsong!"

In an instant the obsequious waiter is standing deferentially by his side.

"Deenay poor duh. Vang blong soop-ary-ur!" says Semple.

"Very good, sir," says the waiter. "Two dinners an' the extry white wine."

I cannot use foot-notes. Yet I ought to explain that Semple is speaking French. It is necessary in these little Bohemian

places. The waiters are always foreign, you know. Mostly Irish.

But to proceed. The action goes on. The place is hot and full of actors and artists. From the actors we get the action, — from the artists the hot air. They were hot air artists. There were also a few other people. They paid cash. In the next room a fellow was singing "All Alone." Everybody wished he was. The orchestra — that is to say, the piano and fiddle, tried to drown his noise. But, no. The place was very Bohemian.

The dinner was served. There was a dead fish, laid out reverently on two slices of tomato. It was said to be an anchovy. Identification incomplete. They ate it. Then soup, trimmed with the garnishings of yesterday's entrée. They absorbed it, noisily. Then more fish. Also dead. Very. Then the entrée, garnished with the trimmings of to-morrow's soup. It was very Bohemian. Nastursia smiled. It was not at Semple. She did not think he saw it, but he did. It was a sweet smile. He changed the five-spot over into the other pocket. She smiled again, — and raised her eyebrows. Semple lowered his. He was getting wise. This kept up. Semple looked innocent, but he was getting wiser every minute. Again she smiled — over his shoulder — and blinked. No, child, Semple was not on the blink.

The caffay was served. Coffee at Child's — caffay at this unique little place. It's spelled café, — same as a saloon. Semple turned his head, — and yet his head was not turned. I told you he was a good sport, but nobody guessed it. He looked over his shoulder. He saw the object of Nastursia's adoration.

Hush! We must speak reverently now. God made it, therefore let it pass for a man. That is adapted from Shakespeare. It is part of Portia's portion. We are very literary. There is true culhah in all we write.

The man behind Semple continued to ogle Nastursia, openly. She responded, coyly. She thought Semple was too easy to notice. He *was* simple-minded. Had he not been he would not have been wasting his money on Nastursia. But she did not regard it in that light. She considered herself irresistible.

There was an old song, "I may be crazy, but I ain't no fool!"

That was Semple. No fool he! He rose from his chair and begged Nastursia to excuse him for a moment. Such things have

happened before in these quaint little Bohemian places. Especially toward the end of dinner. Nastursia beamed. Scales have beams, but the scales did not fall from her eyes. She was dazzled by the splendor of her new conquest. Alas and alackaday! Poor Nastursia! She never noticed that Semple took his hat and stick when he left her. Her eyes were fixed on the O O A.

Foot-note at last, by GUM! Object of Adoration.

A little boy came along with roses, absolutely fresh — from the ice-box. The O O A glanced at Nastursia, then at the boy, — and raised his eyebrows. Just about all he *could* raise. The boy looked expectant. Nastursia closed her eyes, dreamily, and opened them again, coyly. She was thinking how she could make Semple believe she had bought them herself.

The word was given. The boy approached Nastursia and she selected a bunch of roses, critically but daintily. The boy returned to the O O A. A ten-cent piece lay on the corner of the table. The boy looked at it, wonderingly. Nastursia was surreptitiously bowing her thanks. The O O A pushed the dime toward the boy, haughtily. The boy shook his head, disdainfully. Eheu! Eheu! That is Latin and means the same as alas, alas. Would that we could draw a veil! But we cannot. Or a check! But nay. The truth must ever rise triumphant — and that reminds me to say that there are some darn delicate touches in this story. But nary a touch in this quaint little Bohemian place! Not much.

The O O A had exactly fifty cents in his pocket.

THE DEADLY PARALLEL

Original Schedule		Revised Schedule	
Dinner	.40	Dinner	.40
Waiter	.10	Flowers	.10
	—	Waiter	nix
	.50		—
			.50

"It was always a dime," whispered the O O A in a husky tone.

"Dese rosa — verra fina! Twenta-fiva centa!" insisted the boy, stolidly.

A ravishing smile of gratitude stole from Nasturtia's half-closed eyes, and she raised the roses to her lips and caressed them, languidly.

Bah Jove, old chap! Damn the expense, doncha know! Be a sport and use your wits, old top! The other fellow looks simple. Scratch an acquaintance with him when he comes back and stick him for all three dinners. Easy enough. Girl old friend. Haven't met for yeahs. By the way, pocket must have been picked! Large roll of bills (unpaid) when leaving home. Thanks, awfully — She'll fall for that all right, bless her dear, inexperienced little heart! Think all the more of a chap with a bit of spunk, no doubt! Let her go!

The scene shifts. Semple is at the cashier's desk writing a note. When it is finished he pays for *one* dinner, — and that's one dinner won. Then he points through the little peek-hole in the wall to the O O A, who is exchanging significant glances with Nastursia, and whispers to the cashier:

"Old sweetheart of the lady. Quarreled once but will make up now if they have a chance. Send him in this note and tell him I've gone. They'll both thank me for it. I've paid for my dinner and here's a quarter for the waiter."

The cashier smiled, understandingly. Many a love affair has been arranged in these quaint little places. There could be no question about a gentleman who would leave a quarter for the waiter, and Semple departed amid the bows and salaams of all the hired help.

The note was handed at once to the O O A. He opened it with trembling fingers and read:

> "Nobody but a cheap skate would butt in on another man's girl in a quick-and-dirty like this. You have certainly qualified for the title and seem to be having all the fun. I cannot deprive you of the pleasure of paying for her dinner. Good-night, Mr. Cheap Skate, and good luck to you both."

I have said that Semple was a good sport. He was. He never would have left Nastursia in the lurch had he known that she and the Cheap Skate together could not scare up the price of even a single dinner between them, and that they were both arrested for attempting to beat a hotel. Selah.

The Epic of Cleo.*

BY WINONA GODFREY.

ER name wasn't really Cleo Richmond — it was something like Schultz — and very likely she couldn't have told herself whether it was short for Cleopatra or whether she had merely purloined it from Cleo de Merode. Not that Cleo bore the most remote resemblance to either of these worldly ladies in any respect whatever. She was merely actuated in her selection by that unintelligent romanticism whose ears are tickled by high-sounding appellations.

There is once in a while in the soul of the most commonplace, unintellectual simpleton a spark of hero-worship, lighting them through persevering toil and suffering that would daunt a Hercules. The simpleton who called herself Cleo Richmond called herself that because she was a simpleton, and not from any motive of concealing her identity.

In the beginning she was a homely, awkward, flax-headed, good-hearted, simple-minded girl, whose father had a truck-garden a little way from San Francisco. Naturally she made occasional trips to market, and when she was about seventeen she began to get city-struck.

So presently she came to town and went to work in a restaurant. It was a cheap little restaurant, but she was so green that at first she only helped in the kitchen. She was well paid, however, with three dollars a week and her board. The room was six by eight feet with a window two by three, and as for the board, well, it kept her alive.

She did not find her privations especially irksome because, always having been used to them, she took it all as a matter of course, and spent no strength bewailing her fate. Besides, by the time she was promoted to waitress she had also become obsessed.

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One evening, out on an extravagant lark with the other girl in the restaurant, the latter took her into the old Central Theatre and there for the first time in her life, she beheld a play, a melodrama. From that moment, to be an actress was the one ecstatic dream of her life.

There must be something in the old idea of demoniac possession and obsession, especially in this matter of being stage-struck; and its imp is certainly very often of a most sardonically humorous turn of mind.

The dramatic sections of old magazines (or new ones when she could get them) became to Cleo as Bibles to the devout. From them and from her labored reading of light novels, she gleaned that name of Cleo Richmond, after some dallying with De Vere and Gwendolin and Clarice de Vernon.

At least one night in every week found her gaping open-mouthed from a gallery seat at some play, good, bad, or indifferent, for naturally her selections lacked discrimination. Not being introspective nor analytical (nor indeed having the slightest idea what such things are) she saw no reason why she could not do as those happy beings she admired, since she so ardently desired to do likewise.

How to go about it to attain this desired end, she of course, had no notion whatever. But the true searcher finds most things in time. Poring over an evening paper during a slack hour in the restaurant, Cleo's eyes suddenly fell upon the advertisement of a second-rate dramatic school. With a beating heart, she spelled out its specious promises. It appeared to her unsophisticated mind that its students were guaranteed to step at once into the most exalted positions. Dancing, fencing, voice-culture, and a thorough dramatic training — all for twenty-five dollars for a term of three months. Six months training usually found a student prepared to take the principal parts in good companies, which places the school of course readily obtained for them.

Cleo did not have twenty-five dollars, had never had that much money at one time. She had been getting very little of her three dollars in cash because Schmidt, the restaurant keeper, had advanced enough for her black dress and aprons when he hired her,

and this had to be paid back. Luckily, it was now just about accomplished, and Cleo at once began to hoard.

Much as it hurt her to refrain, no more quarters went for gallery seats, not a penny for any tiny pleasure. Tips were not frequent at Schmidt's, but once in a while she added a nickel to her store from this source, and once she actually found a fifty-cent piece on the sidewalk. This seemed almost like miraculous intervention. And when she had achieved twenty-four dollars, she felt herself upon the verge of nervous prostration for fear of robbers or fire or earthquakes.

Well, at last, she took the money and presented herself at the Eugene Wetherell Academy of Dramatic Art, which institution held forth in a stuffy hall on the fifth floor of an old building on O'Farrell Street. Mr. Wetherell, a sallow, middle-aged man with lots of hair, came forward to greet her, and to put her almost incoherent desires into words for her. His manner was most attentive, respectful, and encouraging. If he had any inclination to laugh at this great gawk of a girl, he manfully concealed it, but surely such small villains can have little sense of humor. And he was on the trail of her twenty-five dollars. His lips did not even twitch when he wrote "Cleo Richmond" in his little book as an enrolled student.

Cleo, of course, could not leave her work to attend all the regular classes, and besides, Mr. Wetherell did not exactly relish her presence among his students, so he compromised by letting her come when she could and giving her a "private lesson" now and then.

The appearance and antics of the poor girl in the classes threw the others into such paroxysms of mirth that Wetherell kept her out of sight as much as possible. She herself was too bewildered and too engrossed with her awe of it all to notice. Poor Cleo was about as graceful, as light-footed, as quick-witted, and had about as much talent for acting as the average cow. But she chewed away at her chosen art with quite that animal's perseverance with its cud.

She struggled with "vocal gymnastics" from "breathing" and "tone" all through "inflection," "quality," "force," "stress," and so on, and proceeded to "Elocution" without al-

tering her slow, heavy tones in the least, or having dinned more than the faintest conception of what it was all about into her head.

The labors of Hercules were trifles compared to her racking exertions to commit to memory various selections beginning —

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank —"

"Stay, lady, stay, for mercy's sake,
And hear a helpless orphan's tale!"

And

"Lud, Sir Peter! would you have me be out of the fashion?"

She came down on the light and airy cadences with the fairy footfall of a hippopotamus.

Of course, by the time the first three months were up, Cleo had saved the necessary twenty-five dollars for another term. She had had this fifty dollars and six months fixed in her mind from the beginning as the unavoidable preliminaries to her career. After that she anticipated smooth sailing and large pecuniary rewards.

During the greater part of this second term she wrestled with Juliet's soliloquy before taking the potion, beginning:

"God knows when we shall meet again.
I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins
That almost freezes up the heat of life;"

Of this Cleo was mightily enamored, having an absurd penchant for tragedy. This particular selection she spouted morning, noon, and night, not really comprehending it, but having been thrilled by its mouthing rendition at Wetherell's.

Wetherell now paid very little attention to her, and was quite ready to let her go when her six months were up. Her awkward, poverty-stricken figure, in its worn and shiny dress, her big, red hands, her dull, cheerful face, did not combine to make her a very good advertisement for the school. Besides, he had overheard several of the students observe that it really was a shame to take the poor girl's money, so he had decided to dispense with Cleo.

It was, however, quite in accord with her own ideas when he called her into his office and, giving her a note to a certain theatrical agency with which he was connected, told her that he guessed it was time for her to "break into the profession."

The theatrical agent was a seedy little man with a dirty collar, and his "office" was a dingy little den, or rather two dingy little dens, but he made a great show of being busy. He took Cleo's name and address without a smile, noted her "line" as "utility" and told her to "drop 'round occasionally."

Accordingly, she spent all her spare time sitting there quietly on an uncomfortable, wooden chair, her hard hands folded in her lap, a hopeful wistfulness in her round blue eyes. The people going in and out sometimes never looked at her at all, sometimes stared rudely, sometimes looked away with a grin.

The agent himself never seemed to notice her again. Once or twice after he had ushered some man into his tiny inner room, the man would look out, give Cleo a sharp glance, then shut the door, his loud laughter striking strangely across the dusty silence of the outer room. Cleo did not seem to connect the glance and the laughter. Patiently she sat on, waiting, waiting, with apparently no misgivings, no heart-sinkings, just with that stolid, plodding, exhaustless patience.

Months passed.

Her people at home thought she must have lots of money saved up. She was a prudent girl, they agreed, when they saw how shabby she was — she was not spending her money foolishly.

And then, at last! He was a large man in a checked suit, with a fat cigar in his mouth and a rakish little cane in his hand. The little agent's behavior to him was most affable and obsequious. Their conversation in the "private office" seemed pleasantly mirthful. Then the agent opened the door and beckoned Cleo.

"Here, Richmond!"

She went to him with a smile of childish pleasure on her face.

"Mr. Goldsmith here thinks he can use you," said the agent by way of introduction.

Mr. Goldsmith leaned back in his chair and cocked his hat over his eyes while he looked the girl over from head to foot.

"What can you do?" he asked, between his teeth.

Cleo had her "stunt" all ready.

"The — the Potion Scene," she stated, modestly.

"Potion Scene, eh? Fine! Let's hear it."

She proceeded. There was no doubt about its being side-splitting. But neither man so much as batted an eyelash.

"Y'know," said Mr. Goldsmith, when she had fallen over at "Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee" with a crash that made the windows rattle, "I think you're just what I want."

"Yes, sir," Cleo gathered her ungainly length rather sheepishly off the floor.

"I'm puttin' on kind of a burlesque down at the Columbian," continued Mr. Goldsmith. "Woman who was goin' to do this stunt's got the typhoid. You won't have no other part—just interpolate this in the second act. Rehearsal in the morning at ten. Fifteen a week."

"Yes, sir," murmured Cleo, faint with joy.

As she went out, Mr. Goldsmith was saying: "Of course, you never can tell whether the real thing will be as funny as an imitation."

"You can't beat it," asserted the agent, confidently.

Cleo at once gave up her place at Schmidt's to Schmidt's wrathful surprise.

"Where you go?" he demanded.

"I'm goin' on the stage," Cleo replied, with exactly the rapt intonation she might have used in saying, "I'm going to be an angel."

"Ach, Gott!" cried Schmidt, rolling his eyes, and commented no further.

There were only two rehearsals before the opening performance of Goldsmith's Imperial Burlesque Company, and during these Cleo was not given time to notice the stares and titters of the company. The stage manager finally drilled it into her when she was to come on and how she was to get off, but he made few changes in her own rendering of her "part."

On the opening night, they sent a fat woman, short-winded but not unkind, to help "make her up." They also furnished the costume, which looked rather outlandish even to Cleo.

When her turn came, the stage-manager, who had been keeping his eye on her, pushed her out on the stage. For a moment she stood, tongue-tied and terror-stricken, the prompter shout-

ing her first lines openly, as it was intended he should. Then she rallied and began. She had not been told, of course, to be funny. She had been urged to do her best, and she was bound to do it. At it she went, tooth and nail, with deadly earnestness and persistence, but in a sort of panicky trance. The audience held its sides. This serious gawk, ranting and cavorting, was the drollest thing! When she fell over at the last, they fairly howled. The curtain fell on this, and while she was scrambling to her feet, they raised it again. "The laughter and applause was deafening."

Yes, Cleo was a hit. Even the stage manager was smiling as she blundered off, and the rest of the company was fairly hysterical.

Cleo looked around confusedly, not quite understanding, not just sure — *Why, they were laughing!* The company was laughing, the audience was laughing — they were *laughing.*

Like an ungainly automaton she returned to her dressing-room; mechanically she pulled the silly flowers from her hair, took off the cheap, "freak" costume, and put on her own poor garments. Her face was expressionless, but a certain dignity behind its stoicism kept the others from addressing her.

She stumbled home to the room she had rented so confidently the day before, and threw herself upon the bed without undressing. Of course, she knew that she was not bright like some people, but she was not too stupid to know that the words she had spoken were sad, and she had not at all meant to be funny — and *they had laughed.*

Of all weapons laughter has the keenest edge and makes the deepest wound. Dulness of intellect does not turn its point. At last, Cleo's armor had been pierced, and the pain of the wound smarted greatly. She lay staring at the ceiling, and thought she did not close her eyes all night. But she did.

In the early morning she rose, washed the traces of paint from her face, put her belongings into a bundle and started home. It was many miles and the sun was hot, but all day she trudged on with that ox-like endurance.

Perhaps she was not analyzing things very deeply — everything had not been made clear in a flash. But dimly, vaguely, she

felt it all, and she suffered. All her nebulous dreams, her shadowy ambitions, her toil, and stinting, and drudgeries, her humiliations and abasements, seared her spirit, even if her dull brain yet failed to wholly comprehend.

The sun was low in the west when she opened the gate before her father's shanty and walked, heavy-footed between the neat rows of cabbages to its open door.

Within, her mother hovered over the hot stove, and the children's voices rose clamorously as they bunglingly set the table. Cleo dropped her bundle on the floor.

"Mother," she said, "I come home. I don't like town."

Her mother looked up from the sizzling pans with the drudge's lack-lustre eye.

"Ja wohl," she replied, briefly. "Put you a plate on—supper iss retty."

Two Christmas Eves.*

BY WILSON S. HENRY.

(This story appeared in THE BLACK CAT thirteen years ago and is reprinted by request.)

NUMBER 1, the overland express, had just roared past Granite in its western flight, and Number 17, the fast freight, was reported four hours late, so the agent had four hours of Christmas eve to himself. There was a glowing, soft-coal fire in the whitewashed stove in his snug little office, which threw out welcome heat. The light of a kerosene lamp was subdued by an ornate paper shade, upon which some Louis XV sort of people were doing a gay dance on a green lawn.

The agent at Granite was a tall, good-looking young fellow, with a smooth face that, just now, was so bright that it had to be shaded like the lamp, with a soft felt hat. Observant people who glanced at the Granite depot out of car windows as the train rushed past usually said: "What a dreary life!" or wittily asked each other how any one could exist in such a spot, "a thousand miles from nowhere." Now the fact is, that instead of being "a thousand miles from Nowhere," Granite was just six miles from Everywhere — the place at which all of us try to locate sometime or other.

The Everywhere of this poor devil of an agent was the ranch of one Thompson, and the girl who made it Everywhere was Thompson's daughter. She had made it Somewhere to him for a long time, and very gently, but surely, had it come to be Everywhere. They had taken many long rides and walks over the prairie, that gently undulated away from them with but little topographical interruption for hundreds of miles in every direction. His love for her had grown to accord with this vast expanse of landscape, until it filled all the vista, from the hills that

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narrowed into a cañon in the east, to the far, high mountains in the west. And so, because it was a great, vigorous, outdoor love, he had found it hard to tell her of it by word of mouth, though he often felt that just a little word would do it all, so nearly did her thought seem to run with his, and so knowing were her dark eyes.

This Christmas eve he told her all about it on paper. With an absurd idea of doing justice to the thing, he filled both sides of ten sheets — the Railway Company's own private paper — and then, in despair, he had put it all into three lines. He finally compromised on two pages of what was really, from a literary standpoint, an admirable specimen of condensation. It was to be sent out with some Christmas gifts, brought out for him from Cheyenne by the obliging conductor of Number 3.

For Her mother there was a Scotch plaid shawl of florid design.

For Her father there was an elegantly bound morocco volume of five hundred gilt-edged leaves, entitled, "The Horse; His Diseases," with a spirited gilt horse, remarkably free from disease, cavorting upon the cover.

For Her there was a "hand-painted" satin Christmas card. It bore a winter scene that sparkled beautifully with imitation snow. Under it was a pretty verse, so warm with love that it would have melted anything more like snow than diamond dust. The packages were wrapped up and the letter duly addressed.

As he sat waiting for Thompson's man, Whittaker, who had promised to look in after finishing his business at Fleener's store, he gave freedom to his fancy, which threw love-lights ahead and showed him that golden future we all dream of, and which always cheats us by dribbling along, one poor little day at a time, instead of coming all at once, as we promise ourselves it will.

From the confused rattling of the telegraph key his ear suddenly caught the letters "Gn-Gn-Gn-"; his call. He took the following message: —

ROCK CREEK, IDAHO, December 24.

P. J. THOMPSON, GRANITE: —

East drift cut ore pipe below fault yesterday. Breast in solid horn silver. Assays forty-one to sixty-four hundred. Old Chute sure.

WARNER.

As he sent back the "O. K." Whittaker and Fleener came in. He arose excitedly with the message in his hand.

"Say," he said, "they've struck it in the old man's claim — found the old vein. Look here — four thousand dollars a ton; how's that for a little Christmas present?"

"The hell you say!" exclaimed Whittaker fervently; "well, I want to tell you right here that I never worked for a whiter man than old Thompson; must be hundreds and thousands there. Holy Smoke, what a strike!"

"More'n likely it'll pinch out 'fore they git in six foot," said Fleener.

"Yes; 'n more'n likely they got fifty million dollars there askin' to be shot down and histed out. He's a dead square man, too. I'll take that telegraph out in a hurry. You got some other stuff to go?" he queried of Andrews; "be quick with it."

"Why, yes; I — here — No, no — nothing else at all."

"Well, so long! I'll skin out with this; it'll paralyze him!"

"Prob'ly ain't nothin' but a blamed pocket," said Fleener. "'Tain't no trick to find good *prospecks*. What's the matter, under the weather? Ain't feelin' well, eh? Guess I'll go over to th' store'n tell the boys about it."

For a moment Andrews stood still, trying to determine just what calamity had befallen him. He took the three packages and placed them on a table in his little bedroom off the office. He took the letter in both hands, as if to tear it across, but hesitated; then he put it away in the bedroom with the painted satin Christmas card. It was worthless now, like the currency of a conquered nation; but it had once been legal tender for a fortune of dreams.

A little later an operator in the Chief Dispatcher's office at Cheyenne said: "Granite must be getting a Christmas jag on; he broke four times, taking that order for seventeen."

Three days later at the station, Thompson said to Andrews: "Well, we're goin' to get out of this God-forsaken place at last, goin' to travel awhile, and then we'll settle in a civilized country where we can have first-class advantages. There's that daughter of mine has grown up here on the desert and never seen anything. I'm goin' to take her where she can see the proper sort of people and live right among 'em."

"I think she will lead a very happy life," said Andrews.

"Well, it won't be my fault if she don't. We got money now, and she can trot with the best of 'em."

* * * * * * *

There was much confusion around the depot the day the Thompsons left. All of Granite was there to see them off, and twenty people can make quite a stir. Martha was sprightly and vivacious, and her pretty, tanned face was rich in color.

"Good-by, Hugh," she said, and she clasped his hand tightly and tried to look into his eyes.

"Good-by, Martha," he said; "I hope you will — "

Whatever it was he hoped, he didn't say it distinctly; it seemed to be something commonplace enough, though. There was a last pressure from her warm little fingers, and she was in the car.

As the train started, she looked out at him with wistful eyes, but his gaze was centered upon an imaginary point a thousand miles or so beyond the farthest mountain peak. For this reason she secluded herself and cried for fifty miles.

* * * * * * *

All through the long days after they had gone he had ample time to think over his loss. While he really felt it to be irreparable, he still possessed that magnificent delusion Hope, which was always reiterating a lot of nonsense to him. In the hot summer days, when the sun blistered the little red wooden building and every green thing died under its heat, his love was only seasoned by it. And when winter came again and dressed the earth in swan's-down and snowy, spangled tights for its Christmas pantomime, the biting blasts only made his love more hardy.

His hope was really not impractical. It comprised simply: the sudden loss of P. J. Thompson's entire fortune through unwise speculation, complete failure of the mine in which he still retained an interest, and the immediate return of the family, in comparative poverty, to Granite. That would bring Her back — his own little Martha of the old days, with her plain dresses and pretty ways; her deep eyes, her soft brown hair, and her little hands that could hide so easily in his. He felt that if she should come back that way he could tell her of his love.

Then there would come days when those foolish hopes that

lure lovers from reason would fail him, and he would grow low-spirited and morose. At such times Fleener would come across the track from the store and cheer him up.

"'Tain't money as makes people easy in this here world," he would remark sententiously. "I know folks with thousands of dollars, et ain't reely any better off'n I be." Mr. Fleener's time was chiefly occupied in sitting in front of his store and meditating cynically. Mrs. Fleener boarded the section men.

"Now jest take that Thompson girl, fer egsample," he said one day; "she'll prob'ly git married to a damned prince er a dook, er some of that riffraff, that's what American girls with money does these times, 'n they git led a dog's life, too; the titles, 'n glory, 'n striped uniforms, 'n hemlets is what ketches 'em every time. My wife's third cousin, Blivens by name, — Homer J. Blivens, — made a pile of money on a paten' right; then his girl up 'n married a furrin' nobleman right away. They'r livin' in a kind of stone palace in Injia, with whole passels of people to wait on 'em, 'n wearin' special clothes fer it."

There was no good reason to doubt the truth of this narrative except the fact that Mr. Fleener was a notorious liar.

Toward the end of the second year after the Thompsons' departure Mr. Fleener sauntered into the office one day.

"Ain't heard the news yit, eh?" he asked Andrews. "Well, Moss Brothers down to Hailey has got a contrak to put up a house fer Thompson, out on the ranch, an' they're comin' back here to live. Mebbe we'll board some of the workers."

"What's that? When are they coming — soon?"

"Oh, I d'no; sometime, I guess. They'll prob'ly have a big one, with blines and coop'los and marble chimleys onto it; n' they'll most likely have gorgeous furnishin's inside — cookoo clocks, 'n music boxes, 'n bristles carpets. Some o' them carpets 's got bristles that long," he added, indicating about eighteen inches.

* * * * * * *

It was the second Christmas Eve. Number 1 seemed to wheeze and grumble to itself at having to stop at a place like Granite long enough to let three people off. But there they were on the platform, and Andrews welcomed them.

"Whittaker won't be along till about nine," he said; "it's a bad night for the horses, and the train was an hour late at three."

"Mother has a bad headache; may she lie down in your room until John comes?" It was Martha. Her hand was white now, but as firm of clasp as ever. Her face was paler, but her eyes were the same. The most striking change was in her waist. Its lines had been emphasized by a cunning artificer in dress, and some latent curves had been developed. She said she was glad to see him again, and went to rub her mother's head with camphor.

"You haven't got an extry pipe, have you, Andrews?" Thompson asked. He was quickly supplied with one, which he filled and smoked eagerly. "That's real smoke," he said; "and you can't get it out of cigars, either. Well, I'm glad to get back to God's country again; back where you can see a hundred miles, and get all the clean air you want to breathe, and don't have to dodge shiny carriages. No more travel for me, my boy. Of course I couldn't get out of it at first — you know how the wimmen folks pester a man; but they'll be contented here, now. We been all over Chicago, and London, and It'ly, and Paree, as they call it. They're too small and crowded, and *slow*, too; they don't get to dinner till supper time, and then they bring you a little dab at a time — tabble dote that is. I didn't stand it long; I'd jest have 'em bring me a good porterhouse steak, *with plenty of fat on it*, and some fried potatoes, and a piece of pie. A man wants to see jest what he's got to eat, and not have a lot of fricasseed truck run in on him after he thinks he's down to cases. They don't know how to use money, either. Why, in Noo York they give you *pennies* in change; and when you get a bill changed, do you think they give you good hard silver dollars that you can feel? Not much! They lay out a lot of greasy one-dollar bills; I got fifteen or sixteen of the mis'able little things in my pockets this minute, and — "

"Hugh!" It was Martha's voice, calling him from the doorway. He had thought her pale at first; now two bright spots of color glowed on her cheeks, and her eyes were unnaturally bright. He stepped quickly into the little room. She closed the door and stood with her back against it, facing him with a look of accusation. He saw that her mother was asleep on his bed. She spoke in low but excited tones, and it seemed to him she